Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy: The Concept of Rationality

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There are philosophers, admittedly great, whose works challenge you endlessly to focus on them—interpreting their thoughts takes hold of you as an unending philological and philosophical task. Aristotle and Kant are such philosophers. There are others, also admittedly great philosophers, whose work releases you to go your own way, whose demand upon you is not to interpret their texts but to follow a path laid down, in an exemplary manner, in their writings. Husserl is such a philosopher.

I began reading Husserl in 1949—picking up a copy of the Boyce Gibson translation of *Ideas* from the library of that indefatigable scholar Rash Vihary Das. Almost forty years of preoccupation with Husserl has—as I look back, I find—set me free to relate to other traditions and other schools of philosophy. Being a 'Husserlian' of a sort, I have not found my access to other philosophies blocked. On the contrary, what is distinctive about the Husserlian path—this being: an openness to phenomena, to the given *qua* given, to the intended meanings precisely as they are intended—challenges you to face up to the task of understanding the other, the other culture, the other philosophical school, the other person. While it has been a long and arduous process trying to understand and appropriate the Husserlian *opus*, the more I have succeeded in it, the freer I have felt to relate myself to the thoughts of the others. I would like to amplify this, on some other occasion, with reference to other modes of philosophizing within the western tradition. On this occasion, I will briefly outline how Husserlian thinking has helped me to understand and interpret the Indian philosophical tradition—in this case, not an other, but I myself.

Had I set out then to explore the 'similarities' and the 'differences' between phenomenology and Indian philosophy, I would have found such features with no great effort, but that finding would have been of no greater value than instituting similar comparisons of Indian philosophy with some other philosophical systems—even if we leave out of consideration the fact, often lost sight of, that Indian philosophy itself, not unlike western philosophy, is a large field containing highly differentiated internal structure. What Husserlian mode of thinking provides us with is not an effective tool for doing what is called 'comparative philosophy', but rather for understanding the other's point of view as a noematic structure and then to go behind it in order to lay bare the experiential phenomenon that is embodied in this structure. The same holds good of phenomenology itself.

I. SKETCH OF A THEORY TO OVERCOME RELATIVISM

Let me begin by formulating my general approach against the background of what may be called the problem of relativism.[1] The all too familiar cultural relativist, if he is a westerner, tells us that the oriental, the Indian or the Chinese, or for that matter, any other 'radically different' community does not do 'philosophy' *in that sense* in which the idea of philosophy was originally instituted by the Greeks. 'Philosophy', along with its implied concept of rationality, is typically western. If the Hindus or the Buddhists did something they today call philosophy, that is not philosophy in the standard western sense; their concept of rationality is radically different from the western. What they call 'their' 'logic' is not 'ours', these 'logics' differ not as Aristotelian from that of the *Principia Mathematica*, but so radically that the same word 'logic' can only be used at the risk of equivocation. It is not uncommon to say that the orientals did not *think*, that they did not raise their intuitions to the level of 'concepts', that their philosophies are in fact religions (and that their religions are intuitive, aesthetic, not conceptual), and so on and so forth.

This raises the large epistemological problem: how can we have access to their thought world save by 'translating' them to ours, which would entail 'transforming' them into our 'constructs' or 'interpreting' them in our terms? As soon as one poses this question, one realizes that the extreme relativism of 'radically different' conceptual frameworks leads, by its internal dialectic, to the denial of such relativism and to the position, argued for by Davidson[2] that there is but our home language and other languages translatable into ours. If we are to understand the other, we must share his framework; if there are different frameworks, different 'worlds', different concepts of 'rationality', we cannot understand them. Could there be a middle ground between these extremes? Could it be that there are *other* worlds, *other* modes of thinking, others in the genuine sense, which are yet accessible to us, not because we all are the same, but because (i) we can also transcend our own 'worlds', (ii) our 'worlds' howsoever different nevertheless have overlapping contents, and (iii) a common identical world is in the process of being constituted by such overlapping contents and by the reflective process of trying to make sense of each other.

Husserl deals with this situation at the level of the ego problematic in the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, and moves on, briefly in sections 56 and 58, to the constitution of higher levels of other cultural worlds. Taking my cue from these and other ideas of Husserl, let me suggest—somewhat briefly and seemingly dogmatically here that (i) although each of us and each culture has its own 'world', it is possible philosophically to reflect on one's world, and thereby to transcend one's world-boundedness and to assume, in the Husserlian jargon, the stance of a transcendental ego; (ii) as a transcendental ego, I can 'apperceive' the other ego as existing there in the mode 'such as I should be *if I were there*'[3]; (iii) I can now understand his world as a sense-structure, constituted by subjective experiences of an eidetic sort, i.e., can establish an eidetic correlation between a noematic achievement and noetic acts, both on eidetic levels; and (iii) finally realize that to say that these 'world-noemata' are *of* one

and the same world is equivalent to saying that the identity of the world is an identity in and through these differences, in the process of being constituted through (iv) intercultural understanding, translation and communication, which always rests upon (v) the increasingly recovered *overlapping contents*, but always preserving the otherness of the other.

II. THE INDIAN CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

Confronted with the historicist-relativistic pronouncements of much of modern thinking, one is left wondering if the Indian concept of rationality was radically different from the western or not. A concept of rationality of a culture is a highly stratified concept, and in any case a higher order concept whose field consists in lower order concepts of various levels. To determine a concept of rationality, one needs to consider: first, what makes, for a culture, a belief acceptable; secondly, what makes a course of action commendable, and, finally, what makes a work of art beautiful. The criteria and principles involved in these operate first of all in the life-world of the community concerned, then in the higher order decisions by the scientists, law-givers and artists, finally in the theoretical discourse of the philosophers. It is to the last that I turn here.

For a brief sketch, the following structure may suffice. For almost all Indian philosophers, the ultimate ground for all evidence, the source for all 'establishment' (*siddhi*), is consciousness (*cit*)—without which no 'being' or 'non-being' could be asserted or denied and there would be 'universal darkness' (*jagadāndhyaprasaṅga*). However, this consciousness is 'neutral' as against truth and falsity; it establishes both. Though a necessary condition, it is not sufficient for establishing truth. For this latter purpose, the Indian philosophers, in different ways, take recourse to a theory of '*pramāṇa*' meaning *both* the specific *cause* of true cognition and also the means of validating or justifying cognitive claims. Every philosophical system in the Indian tradition developed a theory of *pramāṇa* to begin with, which is, at the same time, (a) a theory of *causal* genesis of true cognition and (b) a theory of *justification* of cognitive claims.[4] It appears, then, as though these thinkers solved the problem that has led to much quandary in western thinking: the problem, namely, of how to relate the two spaces—the causal space and the logical space.[5]

To put it this way is to clearly highlight a fundamental difference between Husserlian thinking and Indian philosophy—a difference to which I propose to return later in this essay. For the present, let me continue with the general structure of the Indian concept of rationality. To complete this schematic account, I must add a third component (besides the theory of consciousness and the theory of *pramāṇa*), the theory of action. For all Indian thinkers, cognition issues in a practical, actional response, and the ultimate *guarantee*, for most of them, of the truth of a cognition is practical *success*. A rational belief is one that is appropriately caused, justified by an appropriate *pramāṇa* and leads to successful practice—all three testified by self-evidencing consciousness.

(A) *Theory of Consciousness*

Hussserlian phenomenology guided my search into Indian thinking about consciousness. There are three major components of Husserlian thinking about consciousness: intentionality, temporality and the absolutely foundational—evidencing and constitutive—role of consciousness. Accordingly, I looked at the Indian thinking on these matters from these three perspectives.

(i) *Intentionality.* The thesis of intentionality has itself two parts: that consciousness is always directed towards an object, and—since the intentional object may or may not exist—that every conscious state has a correlative sense or meaning. The first has been a matter of great disputation amongst Indian philosophers (the realists such as the Naiyāyika and the Mīmāṃsā ascribing to consciousness an intrinsic object-directedness (*svābhāvika viṣayapravaṇatva*) and the 'spiritual' (*ādhyātmika*) philosophies insisting on the intrinsic object-lessness (*nirviṣayakatva*) of consciousness. It could at least be said that the Brentano thesis would not have been accepted by the Indian philosophers as though it were a self-evident truth. That the empirical states of consciousness are object-directed was not the point at issue. The issue was: whether the same, or similar, object-directedness could also be ascribed to consciousness even when the latter is 'purified', in Husserlian terms, from all 'naturalistic' adjuncts (*upādhi*). Here one finds a whole array of views in between the two extremes mentioned above, of which at least one is worth mentioning: this is the yogācāra Buddhist view that the *ālambana* (or 'the objective-causal support') of perception is not the so-called external reality, but an internal, cognizable form (*antarjñeya-rūpa*), so that the cognitive act has its own internal objective form.[6]

As regards the theory of sense, the Indian philosophers have by and large preferred a theory of direct reference, their theory of meaning being generally speaking a *referential* theory. In such a theory, as is easy to appreciate, the mediation by sense is uncalled for. However, looking for a theory of sense, one discovers it at unsuspected corners: at those places where the concept of reference is called into question (as in Buddhist *apoha*-theory) or where belief in the eternity of 'word' led them to posit eternal meanings (as in some versions of the *sphoṭa* theory).

In addition to these two questions, Indian philosophers came to focus on two other related issues: does consciousness have a form (*ākāra*) of its own, or does its apparent form really derive from that of its object? The Buddhist who held that the 'objective support' (*ālambana*) is an internal cognizable form of a state of consciousness was, in fact, saying that consciousness has its own intrinsic form (a sensation of blue is 'blue', blue belongs to this sensation not as its colour but as its form).[7] The realists such as the Naiyāyikas and the Mīmāṃsakas defended the opposite view that consciousness of blue and consciousness of yellow differ, not with respect to any intrinsic form of each, but only with respect to their objects which squarely and entirely fall outside them. Consciousness as such is formless (*nirākāra*). Thus you have either a complete realism (the object is totally independent of consciousness which

only 'reveals' it) or an idealism (for which the object is but a form internal to consciousness)[8]—but is there a theory of constitution? It is true that consciousness provides the ultimate *evidence* for all cognitive claims, but this evidencing role does not amount to the constituting role as it does with Husserl. To this last point I will return soon.

(ii) *Temporality*. That our conscious life is caught up in time is a truism. Husserl's thesis regarding the temporality of consciousness should not be identified with this truism. It rather consists in the much more significant contention that even after the entire natural world with its spatiality and temporality is placed under brackets, consciousness as the 'phenomenological residuum' and so as 'purified' and as transcendental, is still temporal, and, furthermore, that this latter temporality of consciousness is the constitutive source of all other conceptions of time—of the objective time of nature and of the time of history. Does Indian thought, with its large concern with the inner life of consciousness, come to recognize the temporality of consciousness in this sense? This is a question which is very difficult to answer. There is no doubt that the Indian conception of time is heavily cosmological, and that by and large, consciousness, in its pure, non-empirical nature, is kept outside of the sphere of temporality. Whether there are no places, possibly in the Yoga or in Buddhism, where consciousness's intrinsic, non-objective temporality comes to the forefront is a question which I am not now in a position to answer.[9]

(iii) *Consciousness as absolute, constituting transcendental foundation.* One immediate reason why some of us found Husserl's *Ideas I* (in Boyce Gibson translation) so captivating—and I read the *Ideas* before I came to read the *Logical Investigations*—is that, trained mainly as I was in the overwhelmingly Vedāntic tradition of the University of Calcutta,[10] the idea of transcendentally purified consciousness as a self-enclosed, absolute realm of being had immediately a familiar ring. But it also became increasingly questionable whether the pure consciousness (called *Brahman*) of Vedānta, absolute and foundational though it is conceived to be, can be said to be constitutive of the domains of empirical realities as well as of abstract idealities. Especially in the Advaita Vedānta tradition, consciousness does nothing, it simply manifests, reveals, illuminates or evidences. The domain of objects—real or ideal, the mundane order, that is to say, is neither created by a Godhead nor an emanation of *Brahman*, but an unreal other for which *avidyā* or ignorance (or Māyā, in the standard usage, cosmic ignorance) is held responsible. A non-intentional, non-temporal, non-actional consciousness cannot constitute. It is the foundation (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of the world-appearance, but it does not bring the world about in any sense—theological or phenomenological. Those who rejected the Advaita theory of a non-actional consciousness, and wanted *Brahman* to be the source of the world, resorted either to the theory of creation of a sort (*sṛṣṭi*) or to a theory of emanation. This meant construing consciousness as a force, as an energy, i.e., *cit* as *cit-śakti* (as, e.g., in Śaivism and, in modern times, by Sri Aurobindo)—which does inject a certain intentionality into the texture of consciousness, but still stops short of a constitution theory for

reasons that lie deep within the structure of Indian thinking.

As far as I understand the issues now, these reasons lie in (i) the non-availability of a theory of *sense* (as distinguished from reference), and (ii) an ontologically oriented mode of thinking. Phenomenological constitution is constitutions of *sense*, not constitution of the thing itself (but certainly of the sense 'thing itself'). With a theory of sense not around, theory of constitution would become either a theory of evidence (that is to say, of how things are evidenced, known, manifested) *or* a theory of real origination (that is to say, of how things come into being). The former gives epistemology (i.e., a theory of *pramāṇa*), the latter a causally oriented ontology (i.e., a theory of *prameya*). Phenomenology is also a theory of evidence, phenomenological constitution is also a theory of evidence, an account of how *senses* come to givenness, and through senses things, but this evidencing function is not simply epistemological but also transcendental (in the Kantian sense of being the condition of the possibility of transcendent reference). Consciousness as an absolute domain of being, also as the foundational being, is recognized, but not as the constitutive source of all transcendence.

Thus Indian philosophical literature abounds in a descriptive phenomenology of consciousness (recall the Buddhist classification of cognitions, the Sāṅkhya-Yoga theory of the various kinds of mental states (*citta-vṛtti*), the Vedānta theory of the various (real or apparent) modalities of consciousness; but these do not—save possibly in certain Buddhist theories—amount to transcendental-constitutive phenomenology. They oscillate between descriptive psychology and metaphysics of consciousness.

(B) *Theory of Pramāṇa*

I have already noted that the theory of *pramāṇa* incorporates into its body the causal and the logical orders in one. This limits the ideality of the logical and the contingency of the causal—as it must, if the two orders are to coincide. In this again, as in the theory of consciousness, ontology prevails. Husserlian phenomenology begins with rescuing the logical from being submerged in the flow of mental life: the ideality of the logical is made to stand out in contrast with the causal order of the psychological. It ties in with the theory of *sense* at one end and the conception of pure form on the other—both essential possibilities within western thought. On both counts, Indian thought moves along a different path.

(i) *Perception (Pratyakṣa).* In the theory of *pramāṇa*, one *pramāṇa* occupies an undisputed place: perception (*pratyakṣa*). Perception is the beginning of cognition, other forms of cognition are founded on it. As the logician Gaṅgeśa put it, it is 'not caused by any other *cognition*' (*jñānākaraṇakaṃ jñānam*), the *first* in the cognitive hierarchy. Though initially it is sought to be defined in terms of the causality of sense-organs, that definition becomes less and less important. The Jainas want to characterize perception by the 'immediacy' and 'clarity' (*vaiśadya*) of the cognition; both these concepts

however are vague. Immediate perceptions are mediated by relational structures of varying degrees of complexity (as *Uddyotakara*, the great Naiyāyika, first showed). In effect, the scope of perceptual cognition was much larger than it has been in the western tradition. While visually perceiving this blue pencil as this blue pencil—i.e., while having a perceptual cognition that is verbally articulated as 'this blue pencil'—I am—on the Nyāya theory which was largely taken over by many other schools—seeing not only (i) this yonder object, but also (ii) the this-ness inhering in it; not only (iii) the blue colour but also (iv) the blueness inhering (not in the pencil but in the blue colour-particular); not only (v) the pencil, but also (vi) the generic property 'pencil-ness'; and not only these relate (i) through (vi) but also relations that tie them together into one complex entity. Thus, on this theory, the universals are perceived (not by any sort of intellectual, rational intuition) but precisely by the instrumentality of the same sense-organs which mediate perception of the particular instance. So also are relations. Recall the suspicions and criticisms that were evoked by Husserl's extension of the concept of 'seeing' to eidetic insight. The Nyāya theory would have been more receptive to such an extension.

Let me take up one particular aspect of the theory of perception which is amenable to an interestingly phenomenological reading. The Buddhists held that our ordinary perceptions are really inferences, because not all the parts of a physical object are presented. On the Buddhist view, a physical object is nothing but an aggregate of parts, and since not all the parts are ever presented, their aggregate is also not presented. What passes as perception, in that case, is really inference from what is given to what is not given. We can really perceive, then, only what is absolutely simple, the pure particular; in effect, true perception is an ineffable experience. The Naiyāyikas argued against this position by asserting (i) that a physical object is not a mere aggregate of parts but a new object that is founded upon the putting together of parts; (ii) that it is not necessary for perceiving this *new* whole that one must be perceiving all its parts, and (iii) consequently, that we may be truly perceiving a whole even when not all its parts are presented. One may read here a phenomenological thesis that perception of a part may serve as the basis for arousing expectations of having the other parts presented,that as this perceptual process unfolds each perspectival presentation contains the intention that there is a determinable whole that is being presented through it and that further exploration of the whole clarifies and progressively fulfils that intention, while all along the same whole that was originally intended is being brought to more adequate givenness. What is perceived in any case is a whole—but always *through* some of its parts (and perspectives[11]).

(ii) *Inference (anumāna).* The Indian *interest* in inference has been cognitive—i.e., as a mode of knowing the world. This has two aspects each of which contrasts sharply with the western logic. On the one hand, inference is studied as a cognitive process consisting in an ordered series of cognitive episodes. This seemingly psychologistic account contrasts with the western understanding of inference in term of propositions as ideal entities (defended

by Husserl in the *Prolegomena*). On the other hand, inference is studied as a means of knowing an item in the world, as a consequence of which its truth or falsity, rather than its formal validity or invalidity, is what comes to the forefront—which makes it appear as though Indian logic of inference does not quite raise itself to the level of 'formal logic'.

Husserl's philosophy of logic enables us to have surer grip on the nature of Indian logic—firstly, by locating it in the context of the issue about psychologism, and secondly, by seeing how empty formalism and the cognitive interest go together. The Indian theory of *anumāna* does tell a story about how inferential cognition takes place, the story is in terms of a rule-governed sequence of cognitive episodes. This story thus appears to be psychologistic. But each cognitive episode was assigned a content, in terms of which its linguistic expression was structured, which is not subjective in the sense in which the episode itself is. It is this content, shareable by numerically distinct episodes, that is relevant for determining which sequence of episodes can result in a true inferential cognition. If the reaction against psychologism led, in the *Prolegomena*, to a Platonism of ideal entities, the Indian thinkers, rather than detach the content from the act and assign it a distinct ontological status, construed the mental itself in a non-psychologistic manner[12]—such that (i) the content of the mental retains an identity across acts and (ii) the temporal sequence of acts, under appropriate causal conditions, leads to an inferential cognition that is 'true'. Thus the rapproachment between psychology and logic was done by logicizing psychology as much as by psychologizing logic: the former by assuming that the psychological process of reasoning conforms to the logical (any seeming deviance, as in supposedly fallacious reasoning, being due to misconstrual of the premises), and the latter by making logic a logic of cognitions rather than of propositions.

It was again the Husserl of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* who showed the way to embed the formal within an originally cognitively oriented interest. It is not that the Indian theory of *anumāna* does not know of formal validity. In fact, a formally valid mood can be abstracted from a valid Nyāya *anumāna*. But since the interest was in cognitions (and not in either sentences or in propositions), and in *anumāna* as a *pramāṇa*, i.e., as a source of *true* cognition, the merely formally-valid inference, as in *tarka* or counterfactuals, was left out of consideration.

(iii) *Word (śabda).* I will only make some brief remarks about this unique component of the theory of *pramāṇa*: the theory, namely, that there is a variety of cognition that is entirely word-generated (*śabda-janya*). The latter includes not only knowledge of moral rules, spiritual goals and practices, which are derived from reading, interpreting and understanding the scriptural texts, but also such empirical knowledge of the world as is derived from *listening* to the utterances of competent—intellectually and morally competent—speakers (and derivatively from *reading* the writings of competent authors). I will not go into the reasons advanced by the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā authors as to why

such cognition cannot be reduced to either perception or inference and deserves to be recognized as a mode of cognition *sui generis*. I will not also discuss the theory of meaning that underlies this claim—clearly, it is a referential theory of meaning. What I intend to make a few remarks on is the suspicion that the theory of word-generated cognition, and the important status accorded to it, might undermine the critical nature of the theory of *pramāṇa*. At worst, it appears to be a device to justify scriptures, at its best it amounts to stopping the process of critical enquiry by appealing to the competence, and noble intentions, of the speaker or of the author. In the context of Husserlian phenomenology, the theory would appear to drive a wedge between the claim to know and the need for fulfilling the meaning intention, such that merely *understanding* the sense of the speaker (if accompanied by belief in his competence) is taken in this case to amount to knowing that something is the case.

If strictly Husserlian phenomenology fails to be of help here, it is hermeneutic phenomenology which comes to our aid. If what is crucially at stake is not so much our knowledge of empirical facts which are perceptible, and so inferable in ordinary manner (so that the belief generated by the speaker's utterance is capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed by ordinary perception and inference), but our knowledge of moral rules and spiritual goals and means—then the theory of *śabda* has a pretty good case. But, first, let us bear in mind that the charge of uncritically yielding to testimony is superficial and does not cut deep. The theory of *pramāṇa* provides the critical norms, and the question, whether a cognitive claim is valid or not is to be judged in the light of these norms. If *śabda* is a *pramāṇa* (under appropriate conditions), then one cannot challenge word-generated cognition as uncritical; that would amount to importing a critical norm that is not in consonance with those of the theory itself. Thus one cannot *prima facie* rule out *śabda*, but has to question, *from within the tradition of Indian philosophy*, if it deserves a place in the list of *pramāṇas*.[13]

While the logico-epistemological issue unavoidably is: whether we need to distinguish between *sense* (which is grasped in mere understanding of a sentence) and *reference* (which is grasped in knowing), there are domains such as moral rules where it is through *interpreting* linguistic discourse (and not through any further empirical verification) that one determines what one ought or ought not to do. The point underlying this claim is *not* that one ought to do *because* S (a competent speaker or text) says one ought to do (for that would be to say that moral rules are inferred from the fact that S has uttered sentences embodying those rules). It is rather the point that we learn the rules only from hearing/reading and interpreting verbal instructions. Note that if an accepted set of moral rules is given up, it is given up by imbibing another set of moral rules on the basis of another set of verbal instructions. In this case, *śabda* corrects *śabda*—as a perceptual error is corrected by another perception. It is through these accepted texts that a tradition is built up, but the tradition is not a monolithic interpretation of the basic texts but leaves room for interpretive differences as well as for new possibilities for interpre-

tation. Thus although the different schools of Indian philosophy moved within the space opened up by the *śruti* texts, these schools realized quite different interpretive possibilities.

(C) *Theory of Action*

Husserl wanted to overcome scepticism entirely on theoretical-cognitive grounds (although he includes actional elements within the overall structure of theoretical constitution-analysis of certain kinds of objectivities) by founding knowledge on a stratum of self-evidencing cognitive experience (such as inner time-consciousness or, possibly, the *lebendige Gegenwart*). This is what accounts for its characterization as a variety of 'foundationalism'. Indian thinking also is anti-sceptical[14] and anti-relativistic. While *theoretically* cognitive claims are justified with one or more of the *pramāṇas*, the *pramāṇas* themselves owe their 'power' to their ability to generate successful action (*saphalapravṛttijanakatva*). Scholars of Indian thought have been so much impressed by the presence of this idea of 'ability to generate successful action' that at least one notable and perceptive scholar has proposed that here in this notion possibly one may locate the *original* Indian understanding of truth,[15] which the different systems conceptualized differently. While this thesis in this form is controversial[16], it nevertheless remains uncontroversial that the idea of successful action is central, not peripheral, to Indian thinking on cognition. The minimal thesis, in this regard, I think, is stated by Udayana: universal scepticism is limited by contradiction with practice.[17] There is no merely theoretical doubt. Doubt eventually tells in practice,[18] it will arrest the originally unhesitating mode of acting and transform it into either hesitant action or inaction.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE INDIAN CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

With this highly schematic outline of the concept of rationality in Indian thought, we are in a position to make a few concluding remarks on it in the light of the theory sketched in I as well as against the general background of Husserl's phenomenology.

One point stands out clearly: the Indian philosophies are *not* philosophies in a sense that is *radically* different from the sense that was instituted for the western world by Greek thought. If the idea of pure theory was denied by insisting on the bearing of cognition upon practice, that does not mean—as critics and lovers alike of Indian thought have been prone to insist—that Indian philosophy did not contain theoretical thinking. It was theoretical thinking with an eye on practice—at a certain level, on a possible transformation of life, but, to be sure, without ever sacrificing the rigour of thinking. The Hegelian thesis that Indian thinking remained at the level of immediacy and did not rise to the level of conceptual meditation, is equally wrong. The conceptuality of the Indian philosophies, in its sheer conceptuality, parallels that of western thought. It never mistook immediacy of experience for thinking. However, the two thought-worlds—the Western and the Indian—intersect

and overlap: they are neither coincident nor mutually exclusive. The relativist may so sunder them that it would seem impossible to understand the one from the perspective of the other: I have come to the firm conviction that that is just not the case. The absolutist commits the opposite error: he mistakes the task of understanding as simply being one of translation.

After setting aside such general misunderstandings, let me turn to phenomenology. Indian philosophy shares with Husserl the basic thesis that all evidence, and so the ultimate ground of all 'establishment', is consciousness. But Husserl sought after a most radical insight to the effect that all mundane formations, all scientific and everyday structures can, in principle, be shown to be rooted in the structures of consciousness such that the reflecting philosopher can, within his own ego, bring this rootedness to intuitive clarity. This radical thesis of transcendental phenomenology has never showed up in the Indian thought world. As emphasized by me earlier, the foundational consciousness, for Indian thought, is an evidencing and/or grounding consciousness, but not quite a universal-constituting subjectivity.

Thus the laying bare of the rationality of our beliefs and cognitions, of moral rules and artistic creations, confronts, in Indian thought, an absolute limit. The *pramāṇas* 'establish' them, the consciousness evidences this act of establishment, but the judicative authority of the *pramāṇas* is not, and cannot be, traced back to their origin in the structure of that consciousness. What, then, is the source of their authority?

It is at this point that the absolutistic feature of Indian thought exhibits its limits. By 'absolutistic feature' I mean its claim to deliver the nature of reality unaffected by the perspectival character of human thinking or by the temporality and situatedness of the thinker. Philosophy was a science, differing from the empirical sciences only in the order of generality. However, as soon as we turn to the highly differentiated—internally divided—world of Indian thought—characterized by endless confrontations and mutual rapproachments between parallelly developing schools, each with its own theory of *pramāṇa*, one cannot but ask a question, which the classical philosophers, no matter of which school, never asked: wherefrom does a school, Nyāya or Sāṅkhya or Vedānta or any other, derive its basic concepts, its list of *pramāṇas* which it so vehemently defends? One cannot trace them back to the *sūtras*, for the *sūtras* only summarized a conceptualization which was already in operation. Perhaps one has to appeal to an anonymous tradition of interpreting the texts! Thus there is an ultimate relativism, an 'either-or', a choice of interpretive tradition. The only absolute behind all this is the tradition with its texts, endowed with a plasticity of meaning which allows such diverse interpretations. This limit to rationality was operative, but never thematized by the philosophers. Now is the occasion to thematize it, and thereby to press relentlessly towards the ground that supports the alternate conceptualizations. I have doubts, however, whether this ground would be anything like the Husserlian transcendental subjectivity—whether we can find anything but the text, the words of *apauruṣeyaśruti* (the heard but not composed text).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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2. Davidson, D., 'On the very Idea of Conceptual Scheme', in: Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association, 17, 1973/74, pp. 5–20.
3. Husserl, E., *Cartesian Meditations*, trans, by D. Cairns, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 19, p. 119.
4. Professor B. K. Matilal has emphasized this dual role of the *pramāṇas* in his *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, esp. pp. 35–37.
5. The problem goes back to Kant's distinction between *quaestio factis* and *quaestio juris*, and has preoccupied such modern authors as W. Sellars, D. Davidson and R. Rorty.
6. Cp. Matilal, *Perception*, p. 362.
7. Cp. M. Hattori, *Dignāga on Perception*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.
8. For more on this, see my 'Consciousness and Knowledge in Indian Philosophy', *Philosophy East and West*, 29, 1979, pp. 3–10.
9. For my on-going research into the concept of time in Indian thought, I am indebted to conversations with Anindita N. Balslev as well as to her own work on that topic.
10. This tradition was built up by such fine scholars as K. C. Bhattacharyya, N. K. Brahma, S. K. Das, Kalidas Bhattacharyya, A. K. Rai Chaudhuri—but most importantly by the incomparable Sanskrit Pandit, Mahāmahopādhyāya Yogendranath Tarkavedānta-tīrtha.
11. I proposed this reading first in 'Reflections on the Nyāya theory of *Avayavipratyakṣa*', *Journal of the Indian Academy of Philosophy*, I, No. 1, pp. 30–41 [later reprinted in my *Phenomenology and Ontology*, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1970]. Cp. Karl Potter's comments on it in Potter (ed), *Indian Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. 79.
12. For more on this, cp. my 'Psychologism in Indian Logical Theory', in: Matilal and Shaw (eds.), *Analytical Philosophy in Comparative Perspective*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1985.
13. I devoted my Presidential Address at the 61st session of the Indian Philosophical Congress, Calcutta, 1986, to this theme. The lecture entitled 'A Critique of the theory of *śabdapramāṇa* and the concept of tradition' has not yet been published.
14. On sceptical trends in Indian thought, see B. K. Matilal, *Logic Language and Reality: An Introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), Ch. 1 ('Logic and Dialectic in Ancient and Medieval India'); also his *Perception*, chapter 2 ('scepticism'). Also see K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London, 1963.
15. Karl H. Potter, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 12, 1984.
16. Cp. J. N. Mohanty, 'Prāmāṇya and Workability - Response to Potter', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12, 1984, 329–338.
17. 'Vyāghātāvadhirāśaṅkā', *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, 3.7.
18. Cp. my 'Nyāya Theory of Doubt', *Visva-Bharati Journal of Philosophy*, III, 1966, pp. 15–35. Reprinted in *Phenomenology and Ontology*.